OMFTS and STOM: An Enemy Opportunity?

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OMFTS AND STOM: AN ENEMY OPPORTUNITY?

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Executive Summary

The OMFTS and STOM concepts are now several years old and yet the Marine Corps still does not have an evaluation of the consequences of potential enemy reactions to them. Unfortunately, these concepts potentially provide the future enemy with a tremendous opportunity to thwart United States foreign policy, associated military goals and objectives. A third World country, using a minimum number of high technology weapons, can use Operational Maneuver From The Sea (OMFTS) and its associated tactic of Ship to Objective Maneuver (STOM) to defeat the United States. In this situation, the definition of defeat is to cause the United States to withdraw from the conflict in question. Conceptually, this defeat is relatively simple, and is accomplished using asymmetric approaches at the strategic, operational and tactical levels.

The sophisticated future enemy will plan strategic, operational and tactical elements all designed with one goal, to kill United States service members. He will specifically target OMFTS and STOM to shape the battlefield to kill a maximum number of Americans while still maintaining combat power for the future. OMFTS doctrine assists this enemy effort by placing a heavy emphasis on operational level objectives with the resulting creation of a Marine mindset dominated by a focus on selection of an objective providing an operational impact or "knock out" blow. Careful deception and shaping operations tailored towards the Marine Corps planners will allow the enemy to predict the Marine military actions and provide the opportunity to use asymmetry against Marine forces. This asymmetry will include strategic, operational and tactical elements. It will also rely heavily on moral (or values) asymmetry, capitalizing on the American tendency to Westernize the enemy.

While OMFTS and STOM are well thought out initial future concepts, further deep thought must occur before actual implementation. This effort must include consideration of intelligence capabilities, both Joint and Marine as well as the potential reactions that an enemy can use against OMFTS and STOM. Additionally, evaluation must occur of the impact of Marine OMFTS institutionalization. Finally, development of specific OMFTS and STOM tactics and procedures must consider the enemy, including an enemy that uses asymmetry as his primary force multiplier. If this further concept development effort is accomplished then the Marine Corps may prevent a national catastrophe.

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The United States Marine Corps takes justifiable pride in its history of service to the nation. This successful past makes it even more likely that the Marine Corps may be surprised to find that its conceptual doctrine for the future may place United States interests and prestige in jeopardy. The United States Marine Corps published "Operational Maneuver From The Sea" in early 1996. Supporting concepts have been published since that time to form a "family" of OMFTS concepts providing further detail, All of these documents are available in the public domain, providing potential enemies access and the opportunity to formulate countering plans. A third World country, using a minimum number of high technology weapons, can target Operational Maneuver From The Sea (OMFTS) and its associated tactic of Ship to Objective Maneuver (STOM) as weaknesses leading to the defeat of the United States. In this situation, the definition of defeat is to cause the United States to withdraw from the conflict in question. Conceptually, this plan for defeat is relatively simple, and is accomplished using asymmetric approaches at the strategic, operational and tactical levels. A considerable factor in the success of this venture will be the minimum amount of thought given by Marines to date on enemy counteractions or reactions to the OMFTS concept.

The OMFTS and STOM Concepts.

Before portraying an enemy plan to defeat OMFTS, building a common understanding of what OMFTS is and how a future enemy might view it is appropriate. The basic concept of OMFTS is:

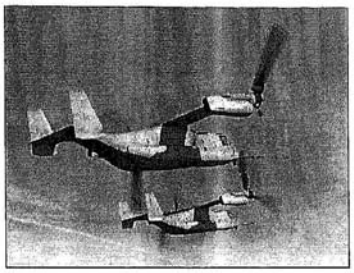
> "The heart of Operational Maneuver from the Sea is the maneuver of naval forces at the operational level, a bold bid for victory that aims at

> exploiting a significant enemy weakness in order to deal a decisive blow. Mere movement, which may lead to indecisive results or even be counterproductive, does not qualify as operational maneuver. That is to say, operational maneuver should be directed against an enemy center of gravity—something that is essential to the enemy's ability to effectively continue the struggle."[1]

OMFTS feasibility is enhanced because of " significant enhancements in information management, battlefield mobility, and the lethality of conventional weapons."[2] The resulting increase in military effectiveness is a decisive OMFTS enabler.

This increased military effectiveness also allows logistics support to remain primarily at sea, avoiding establishment of logistical concentrations ashore within a beachhead area. This "seabasing" of logistics will move lucrative targets beyond the enemy's normal reach. The result will be a minimum number of stationary targets ashore that the enemy can locate and attack various ways.

One of the first "tactical" concepts proposed for use under OMFTS, Ship To Objective Maneuver (STOM), published in July 1997, seeks to exploit future warfighting improvements. These improvements include the MV-22 Osprey, the Advanced Amphibious Assault Vehicle (AAAV) and the Landing Craft Air Cushion (LCAC), all of which form the "mobility triad" that allows optimal execution of the OMFTS/STOM concepts. The anticipated distances to objectives and the OMFTS/STOM emphasis on surprise make these systems necessary. The combination of all three of these systems gives the OMFTS/STOM concepts various methods to project forces ashore, thereby increasing enemy confusion. This rapidity of movement and enemy inability to cover all likely target sites are integral to the predicted success of the OMFTS and STOM concepts.



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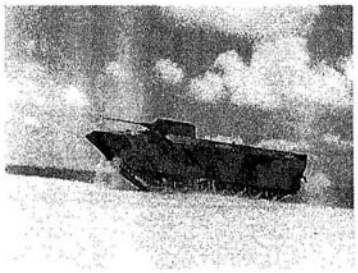

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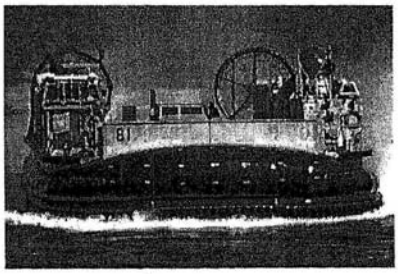

LCAC

The STOM concept uses the mobility of the MV-22, the AAAV and the LCAC to:

> "... independently navigate across the ocean surface to penetrate the enemy's shoreline at points of their choosing. Freed from the constraints of securing a large beachhead, the commander will be able to focus on the enemy and begin the landing force's maneuver from over the horizon. These new capabilities will enable tactical commanders to make decisions as the situation develops to exploit enemy weaknesses and maintain the momentum of the attack from the ship to the objective."[3]

STOM seeks "the opportunity to achieve tactical as well as operational surprise, something seldom possible in past amphibious operations."[4] This surprise effect is predicted to be more effective by causing the enemy to "defend a vast area against our seaborne mobility and deep power projection," rendering most of his force irrelevant.[5] STOM also anticipates applying strength against weakness by projecting "combat power through gaps located or created in the adversary's defenses."[6]

Assumptions.

Before discussing the enemy plan to defeat OMFTS, it is necessary to use assumptions to create a basic framework in which it will be applied. The first assumption is that a Joint framework will exist within which the Marine Corps will conduct OMFTS. OMFTS is a naval concept and embraces the synergy present in the Navy-Marine Corps

team. In today's world (and the world of the foreseeable future) military operations are conducted using assets from all services in some Joint structure. For simplicity, an assumption is that Joint fires, intelligence and reconnaissance assets will support OMFTS at a minimum.

Given this Joint environment, another area requiring a basic assumption is the size of force that reasonably could conduct OMFTS. Some pertinent factors affect this assumption. First, OMFTS is a concept for MAGTF operations, the Marine Corps fights as MAGTF's, and there are no indications that this will change in the future. Second, one of the tenets of the OMFTS concept is that the forces will be lighter and more lethal. Finally, the increased command and control capabilities present in the OMFTS capable force will allow for greater dispersion between units. Given these factors, it is conceivable that a future force with a structure similar to today's MEU could be as lethal as a force of today's MEF (Fwd) size. Granted the above, an assumption is that the smallest size force that would conduct OMFTS would be a MEU. Obviously a MEF could conduct OMFTS as well, although the magnitude of the operation will be dependent upon available sealift and fielding status of the MV-22 and AAAV.

Although the OMFTS is a concept intended for the future (approximately 2015) some of the assets providing capabilities necessary for the concept will be fielded several years before this time.[7] The MV-22 program calls for a limited operational capability in 2001, the AAAV program in 2006, and the LCAC is operational today. With this timespan, it is reasonable to assume that the Marine Corps could conduct limited OMFTS/STOM operations using these systems between 2007 and 2010. This is considerably earlier than the 2015 timeframe envisioned for the original concept and by

the OMFTS Working Group. It is likely that the Marine Corps will face both internal and external pressure to apply OMFTS with the limited assets on hand during this period, although this is certainly not preferable. Because of the limited ability to conduct OMFTS, this interim period will be the best timeframe for an enemy looking to target OMFTS/STOM as a tool leading for defeating the U.S.

With a ten year lead time between publication of the concept and initial capability of conducting OMFTS the enemy of the future has enough time to train and equip his forces accordingly. For purposes of discussion, a basic assumption is that a Third World country will have the ability to purchase high technology weapons and train his military as required to support this concept.

The Future Enemy.

The OMFTS and STOM concepts discussed above both accept a chaotic future but amazingly have limited visions of the future enemy. In both concepts the vision of the enemy is relatively undeveloped and minimizes the enemy's ability to adapt. The OMFTS concept contains the best acknowledgement of the most dangerous potential enemy with the statement "an enemy who is likely to combine the destructive capability of a conventional force with the elusiveness of a guerrilla."[8]

The future enemy will be very sophisticated in his approach to conflict with the United States. This sophistication will extend to familiarity with the capabilities of advanced electronic systems, United States doctrine, and the role of the media in United

States internal politics. The United States has been involved in many conflicts in recent history and the future enemy has been able to study all of them. Using lessons they glean from these conflicts, the enemy will thoughtfully and carefully map out a strategy to achieve their goals against the United States. These strategies will include wide ranging issues such as the role of civilian casualties to the overall plan, possible counteractions to United States actions, how the media can assist the plan as a whole.

Yugoslavian President Slobodan Milosevic's recent Kosovo campaign shows the beginnings of this sophistication. The Washington Post sums this up with the following:

> "A reconstruction of events of the last several months by Washington Post correspondents indicates that the Yugoslav offensive — including random executions and the forced exodus from towns and cities - flowed from a coherent plan designed by Milosevic and his generals and prepared over many weeks by Yugoslav officials. Using terror, overwhelming force, and an understanding of its enemies both foreign and domestic, the country's leadership carried out what one senior NATO military official called a "pre-planned, premeditated and meticulously executed military campaign.""[9]

While appearing to be conducted in reaction to NATO actions it later was found to be a well planned and coordinated campaign that was started much earlier. The future enemy will have this long-range perspective and will focus on the desired endstate of having the U.S. pull out of the situation.

The Enemy Strategic Plan.

With this setting and a common perspective of OMFTS and STOM established, it is possible to discuss the enemy plan to achieve his desired endstate. Strategically, the defeat of OMFTS might be a catastrophe leading to a defeat of the United States. In

recent history, a catastrophic setback has meant the end of the conflict for the United States. The withdrawal of the Marines from Beirut after the barracks bombing in 1983 and the abandonment of Somalia after the ambush of the Rangers in 1993 demonstrate this effect. The perception around the world is that when faced with scenes of bodies of Americans returning home, the United States public loses interest in continuing in a conflict. This apparent "casualty aversion" induced lack of staying power or will is the desired endstate for future Third World countries in conflict with the United States. To achieve this endstate the future enemy will have studied the recent American conflicts and will have a strategic plan that will consist of two simple concepts, inflicting American casualties and media exposure to publicize the results.

The first part of his strategic plan will be to inflict as many casualties on United States forces as possible. The enemy of the future will seek only to cause United States casualties, not destruction of equipment or more operational effects such as penetrations or flanking maneuvers. Normal military maneuvers will only be of use if they lead to the death of United States service members. The above-mentioned recent American military actions will lead the future enemy to believe that maximizing casualties is the most expedient method to defeat the United States. Whether this is a correct read of the American public remains to be seen, but it is reasonable to expect that a future enemy will attempt to use it as a means of winning a future conflict. OMFTS/STOM will potentially provide him the opportunity and target.

The second element to a strategy for defeating the U.S. is the use of the media to advertise the American casualties. Because the OMFTS/STOM doctrine provides some perceived predictability to the enemy, he could view his media efforts as predictable as

well. The enemy will preplan media visits to targeted areas so that rapid media exposure will be available. The enemy will execute these media visits once the Marines show their hand as far as which target site they will use.

These media visits will focus on visual/audio "sound bites" that quickly convey outrage, horror, sympathy or whatever other emotional/intellectual theme has been "targeted." This "targeting" effort will be an important difference from enemies of the past. Casualties, whether civilian or American will provide equal media value for the enemy. The result of this media focus is that attacks, atrocities and other enemy battlefield operations will not be done for their military value but primarily for their media value.

The Enemy Operational Plan.

To accomplish these strategic goals the future enemy may use an operational plan consisting of three parts; deception operations, asymmetrical attacks against U.S. forces, and minimal reliance on expensive platforms (tanks, APC's etc.). This plan will ensure not only that the enemy force is capable of winning but that it has the forces available to do so. This operational plan draws upon lessons from recent U.S. conflicts. Tailored specifically to fit the capabilities and limitations of the United States, it targets OMFTS/STOM as a specific mechanism to win.

This operational campaign will use deception to set up the battlefield for success. The OMFTS concept pushes the enemy towards this goal by stressing application of force against "operational level" objectives. This focus on the "knock out blow" is why

the enemy will target OMFTS and STOM as a defeat mechanism. The OMFTS Working Group final report illustrates the potential vulnerability to deception with the statement "OMFTS must become as much a part of our culture and ethos as amphibious and expeditionary operations have been in the 20th century."[10] While this certainly will ensure that the concept is understood at all levels and that the Marine Corps has a unique capability, it also advertises the Marine mindset.

This is not necessarily detrimental if it is recognized and used appropriately, such as the use of the amphibious forces during Desert Storm. The danger is that the enemy will apply deception operations against the Marine Corps to paint a picture of a "lucrative" operational target that will capture the attention of Marine planners. This deception could even go so far as to use actual operational targets to reinforce the deception's validity in Marine Corps planner's eyes. For example, the enemy could position his country's only armor division as an operational reserve, when in fact it is in reality only bait.

The deception in this case may also rely upon the asymmetrical values issue in that what is operational to American planners may not be considered such by a future enemy. While the enemy portrays this operational target, conventional forces will shape the direction that Marines may conduct STOM. In the enemy view, Marine use of STOM is preferred over normal amphibious operations because it allows the use asymmetrical ambushes vice defending in a more conventional manner.

This enemy shaping effort draws upon the STOM concept discussion of projecting "combat power through gaps *located or created* in the adversary's defenses. These gaps are not necessarily geographical; they may be exploitable weaknesses, such

as limited night fighting capability, poor command and control, lack of endurance or low morale."[11] Planned placement of forces will entice STOM planners towards movement along corridors of the enemy's choosing.

The critical component to this deception operation will be the trap that will be waiting for Marine forces when they apply OMFTS and STOM. The "operational target" at the heart of the trap will be within or near a populated area, creating target identification difficulties and negating American firepower advantages. Enemy forces will be interspersed among the local population to prevent identification as combatants. The enemy will have conducted his own Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield (IPB), identifying likely MV-22 landing sites, AAAV movement corridors and LCAC cushion zones as Target Areas of Interest (TAI's). (This IBP process will be further refined as the OMFTS Tactics, Techniques and Procedures (TTP) are developed and published.) The enemy will position forces on or nearby these TAI' s so that they can quickly react to these sites as necessary.

The use of asymmetrical attacks is the second part of the operational plan. When studying the United States for strengths and weaknesses it becomes apparent that asymmetrical attacks have the highest payoff with the least amount of risk. These asymmetrical attacks will target two particular areas.

The first are attacks against U.S. military weaknesses. An example of an exploitable military weakness is the multitude of intelligence systems designed to identify, track and target things instead of people. The enemy of the future has seen the U.S. capability to target and attack vehicles, buildings and aircraft in recent conflicts. What the U.S. has not demonstrated is the ability to target small groups of people

effectively. The OMFTS and STOM concepts draw heavily on United States intelligence capabilities to locate enemy forces to either allow them to be targeted or avoided. Operationally the future enemy will use this intelligence weakness as a means of structuring and positioning his forces to attack U.S. forces asymmetrically.

Dispersion of combat forces with an ability to mass them rapidly for quick strikes against lucrative targets will be the enemy's operational maneuver of choice. Additionally the increased combat power available to an individual soldier will make these attacks much more devastating. OMFTS will be vulnerable to this type of attack because of the Marine Corps' reliance on national systems within a Joint environment. Moreover, the seabased nature of OMFTS will preclude a robust human intelligence effort by Marines.

The second area targeted for asymmetrical attacks is the U.S. vulnerability to moral (or values) asymmetry. United States forces have a tendency to ascribe Western morals and values to their enemies. An additional aspect to this Westernizing effect is an American belief that a leader will "do the right thing" for his people. The history of the United States relationship and dealings with Iraqi President Saddam Hussein is evidence of expecting a foreign leader to conform to Western ideals. The Marine Corps is especially susceptible to this because of its focus on character and its innate belief in the idea that leaders "take care of their people," therefore making OMFTS and STOM even more attractive to the enemy. The future enemy leader is more likely to have a ruthless nature and be solely interested in maintaining his own power and possess a willingness to sacrifice the lives of his citizens towards that objective.

The enemy will study this Westernizing effect and use it to identify methods of attacking U.S. forces effectively. This may include the use of women and children as delivery vehicles for explosives, the use of crowds as battlefield diversions and camouflage, and the wanton killing of friendly soldiers and civilians as long as it also kills an appreciable number of Americans. These have been used against U.S. forces in the past but more in an isolated fashion, not as part of a planned campaign.

Force Protection of the enemy force is at the heart of the third piece of the operational strategy. This portion of the plan involves minimizing the number of assets easily targeted by U.S. systems. As discussed above, current intelligence systems detect large objects (tanks, APC' s and military trucks), opening a future enemy to intelligence collection, analysis, targeting and attack. The goal of this part of the plan is to negate the U.S. firepower advantage by reducing the number of easily identifiable targets. Handheld weapons are increasingly more capable, precluding the need for vehicle and aircraft mounted systems. Aircraft are also expensive and obtaining the numbers necessary to counter U.S. capabilities is prohibitive.

The effective enemy of the future will invest his limited financial resources in sophisticated handheld anti-armor and anti-aircraft systems, such as the Javelin and Stinger-RMP. He will train and equip his forces so they possess effective infantry skills including extensive camouflage and night fighting training. The goal of this training is to create a force of flexible, tough soldiers who can disperse to operate independently, prevent detection, and still be able to conduct coordinated attacks when required. Given the effectiveness of current (and projected) weapons systems, a small number of these soldiers can wield significant combat power. This force will also intermingle with the

civilian population as much as possible either to ensure politically damaging collateral damage from American fires or to preclude the use of U.S. firepower. This force will easily be able to attack Marine forces, while minimizing their exposure to the technological advances that enable OMFTS/STOM.

The Enemy Tactical Plan.

At the tactical level, this operational concept translates into a focus on ambush type tactics. The enemy's tactical reactions to OMFTS will be hard for Marines to handle, if only because to date little thought has been focused on the tactical portion of OMFTS. It could even be said that these concepts ignore enemy tactical adaptability completely. For example, as shown above STOM advocates exploiting "gaps" in enemy capabilities such as night vision, morale and endurance. These type of "gaps" have been demonstrated in past conflicts and the competitive enemy of the future will easily make them into strengths against the possibility of conflict with the United States. Using these strengths, the future enemy's ambush tactics might take three forms for use against OMFTS. These include MV-22 ambushes, AAAV/LCAC ambushes and moral asymmetric urban ambushes. An essential component to making all of them effective is communications and intelligence.

In order to coordinate these ambushes effectively, human intelligence or passive sensors will pass advance warning of Marine force movement. At night, this may only be a report of the sound of aircraft but given the preparation conducted by the enemy this will be enough. (Thermal sensors are potential passive tools that may detect aircraft in

this situation.) The communications for this information will most likely flow across hard wired telephone systems to prevent jamming or destruction of communications capabilities. Any radios used for communications will be encrypted and use burst or frequency hopping modes to minimize the potential for target acquisition or eavesdropping. (The use of radio communications at all will depend upon lessons learned from previous U.S. attacks on communications infrastructures in Iraq, Yugoslavia, etc.)

Once the enemy detects Marine movement towards an objective, he will alert the forces positioned at previously identified Target Areas of Interest (TAI's). A typical MV-22 ambush could have personnel with shoulder fired SAM's surrounding a landing zone. The enemy will hide SAMs in civilian locations (farmer's vehicles, buildings, buses, etc.) as much as possible. As the aircraft approach, the enemy engages them with a multitude of advanced quality SAMs. Somalia demonstrated that RPG' s also have the ability to destroy aircraft and in this situation would increase the confusion. Firing mortars into the landing zone would create havoc as well. As soon as the enemy forces launch the weapons, they will attempt to fade into the civilian population and relocate to alternate positions for follow on missions.

AAAV's and LCAC's lend themselves to a more normal ambush because of the linear nature of their ground movement. With an objective potentially 60-70 kilometers or more inland, this still equates to at least an hour of overland driving time, allowing time for enemy preparation. The effects of the enemy deception plan to shape the battlefield for STOM will assist this as well. Using rates of movement and directions of travel to locate likely TAIs, the enemy could conduct effective antiarmor ambushes using

advanced weapons, such as Javelin antiarmor shoulder fired weapons. Increased weapons effectiveness combined with the simple goal of causing casualties would negate the need to use typical ambush terrain to channelize the Marine forces. Mortars could again create havoc, this time with high technology antiarmor munitions such as the SAAB/Bofors Strix to increase effectiveness.[12]

Finally, the most difficult ambush for Americans to handle would be an urban ambush asymmetrically targeting American morality. The goal of this type of ambush would be to place Marines in a dilemma related to moral choices. An example of this might begin with a normal urban combat situation where Marines are clearing buildings. As a Marine force, (the bigger, the better), enters a building, previously emplaced explosives could be detonated, collapsing the building and killing all civilians, enemy soldiers and Marines inside. In the past enemies have used suicide soldiers, but in one and two man teams only. The difference in these future ambushes will be that they will act as squads or higher in order to engage as many Marines as possible before detonation of the building. The enemy would anticipate two potential reactions to these attacks. The first is that U.S. forces will either attempt to destroy the building and soldiers before entering (a political tool that the enemy will use). The second is that they will not attempt to get the soldiers at all (a military "victory" if only on a small scale). Both of these reactions are desirable from a future enemy perspective.

While OMFTS provides a sound footing for evaluating Marine Corps structure and acquisition programs, it is not an insurmountable obstacle to and may be an opportunity for enemy forces. Strategically, operationally and tactically the plan outlined above possesses the potential to use OMFTS and STOM against the United States as a

mechanism for winning a conflict. While this is certainly not an intended effect of the concept, evaluation of this enemy opportunity should occur in the ongoing OMFTS debate.

There are some serious questions that should be answered during this debate. The first of these concerns the application of OMFTS against asymmetric enemy forces. How should OMFTS tactics evolve in order to be effective against an asymmetric enemy? The second involves the institutionalization of OMFTS in Marine planners. While the concept of OMFTS is certainly a worthwhile goal, what will be the impact of a Marine doctrinal focus on operational objectives? Finally, the last area of concern is the intelligence collection ability of the MAGTF. If the intelligence gathering systems used do not collect against forces without significant quantities of large systems, how will OMFTS tactics evolve to compensate? Additionally, are there any possible modifications to current intelligence programs that better support collection against the enemy of the future?

While these are certainly not the only unclear areas of the OMFTS doctrine, they do indicate that although OMFTS and STOM are well thought out initial future concepts, further exploration of OMFTS details must occur before execution. This effort must include consideration of intelligence capabilities, both Joint and Marine as well as the potential reactions that an enemy can use against OMFTS and STOM. Additionally, evaluation must occur of the impact of Marine OMFTS institutionalization. Finally, development of specific OMFTS and STOM tactics and procedures must consider the enemy, including an enemy that uses asymmetry as his primary force multiplier. If this

further concept development effort is accomplished then the Marine Corps may prevent a national catastrophe.

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